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AUTHOR	Rodriguez, Juan C.
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ABSTRACT

The underpinnings of the conceptions Southeast Asians have about children with disabilities and special education intervention were studied as a basis for effective intervention for linguistically and culturally diverse Southeast Asian (SEA) children with disabilities. Cultural, historical, and other variables that influenced the perceptions of parents and teachers about disabilities and special education were studied, with emphasis on students of Cambodian origin. Data were collected from 100 SEA parents and 31 bilingual SEA teachers. These data were complemented by a case study involving 12 parents and 2 teachers. All parents and most teachers were Cambodian; some teachers were Laotian or Vietnamese. Parents and teachers acknowledged the contributions of historical and cultural background factors. About half of the parents were not sure whether SEA children with disabilities should go to school, and a quarter were not sure such children could learn. The greater the parental education level, the more likely they were to see the educational needs of children with disabilities. Many participants were unaware of the kinds of special education available for SEA children with disabilities. Teachers and parents expressed willingness to work together and learn more about special education. An appendix presents eight tables of study data. (Contains 40 references.) (SLD)

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ED 388 740

EDUCATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

RESEARCH PROJECT

SOUTHEAST ASIANS' CONCEPTION OF DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERVENTION IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Juan C. Rodriguez Ed. D.

March 31, 1995

College of Education
University of Massachusetts Lowell
Lowell, Massachusetts.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments	a
Abstract	i
Background	1
Who are Southeast Asians	2
Conceptual Framework	3
Methodology	5
Findings	
Teacher's Responses	8
Teacher's Summary	18
Parent's Responses	22
Parent's Summary	29
Discussion and Conclusions	32
References	37
Appendix	40
Survey Questionnaires	
Tables	

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ABSTRACT

The research conducted under this grant, was directed to explore the underpinnings behind the conception that Southeast Asians have about children with disabilities and special education intervention on their behalf in American schools. This study is an effort to provide some of the missing research that support effective education of these linguistically and culturally diverse children with disabilities.

The challenge to educate effectively these new arrivals, cannot be met even by the most committed teacher or school system, if they do not have the research based knowledge that affects the educational beliefs that underlay and mold the perception of Southeast Asians regarding children with disabilities and special education intervention, as it is required by local, state and federal mandates.

This research was theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's cultural /historical theory and the studies conducted by Beth Harry' (1992) and Jean Mercer (1972). They provided a framework for examining the role that socio-cultural factors plays in education, and in this case, how these elements affects the formation on SEA parents' and teachers' conception of children with disabilities, and their conflicting interpretation of the concept of disability due to cross cultural/historical misunderstandings.

The activities delineated by the researchers at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, College of Education, tried to answer the following research questions:

a) what are the cultural, historical and other variables (external to the quality of service provided) that influence individual parents' and teachers' perception regarding children with disabilities and Special Education intervention in American schools;

b) what are the commonalties and unique characteristics that affect both positively and negatively the learning process of Cambodian students with disabilities;

c) what relationship exist between demographic variables such as gender, age group, number of languages spoken, education level and the surveyed attitudinal responses of SEA parents and teachers;

d) how do learning/ teaching strategies for Cambodians with disabilities, differ from other language minority students.

In order to validate effective educational practices and to foster new or improved approaches in special education, it is necessary to have the appropriate knowledge base that comes in this case from exploratory research.

For this purpose, data was collected from a sample of 100 parents and 31 bilingual Southeast Asian (SEA) teachers who participated voluntarily in the study, that was later complemented by a case study in which 12 parents and two teachers were selected based on their typical perceptions.

The sample was obtained from two cities in Massachusetts, one of them only second to Long Beach, California in terms of large concentration of SEAs, both confronting inner-city problems. The race composition of all parents and a large percentage of SEA bilingual teachers is Cambodian; some teachers are Laotian and few Vietnamese.

This study was comprised of the areas of general demographics, and four assessment variables: 1) Schooling / special education of SEA children, 2) Influences in the perception of disabilities. 3) Awareness and knowledge of special education 4) Role in the education of SEA children with disabilities and effectiveness. A survey instrument was developed, having approximately 50 items that covered these five dimensions, which was administered on site using their native language and English.

The instrument used, asked for responses to demographic variables dealing with such areas as gender, age group, number of languages spoken, and family size. It also solicited responses to a number of relevant attitudinal / belief items which were answered in a 5 point Likert Scale format. In addition, numerous open ended items were included to further assess perceptions for qualitative evaluation.

The data collected, was later tabulated, analyzed and interpreted to find common trends, relationships and other significant and relevant unique characteristics.

Descriptive statistics were based on frequency tallies and prepared pie charts and bar graphs to visualize trends and distributions of responses to various survey instrument items.

For the inferential statistical analysis of the data collected, relationships were explored using the Chi square, and Correlation analysis.

More specifically, the statistical test of Chi square was utilized to examine interrelationships using the variables of gender, age and educational level because of the nature of the instrument items' which are of ordinal and categorical data types, and also to explore any statistically significant associations that might exist.

Correlation analysis between quantitative and ordinal scale variables was conducted to examine the degree and type of inter-relatedness, rather than to specifically assess the significance level, especially given that the sample size is relatively small, and that the focus of this study is on exploratory research with hermeneutic purpose, which is to understand how Southeast Asians make sense of disabilities and education of these children in American educational system.

Among the preliminary results of the study, we found that:

1 As a result of the statistical analysis, gender has only one significant relationship to assessment variables, but none with the following:
- Schooling & Special Education of SEA Children
- Influences Affecting Perception of Disabilities
- Awareness & Knowledge of Special Education
- Role in Educating Children with Disabilities & Effectiveness.

However, in some cases significant relationship exist with age, educational level, and languages spoken.

2. Both SEA parents and teachers feel that historical context and cultural traditions affect their conception and perception of disabilities, as well as, their feelings toward education in American schools.

3. Due to cultural factors, Southeast Asians are not likely to assume direct participation in the school education of their children.

4. The younger teachers are more likely to have the feeling that SEA children are often the subject of discrimination or prejudice.

5. Significant number of SEA parents have realized here, that SEA children with disabilities are not abused, and believe that they are not neglected and should not be secluded.

6. Approximately one half of participant parents are not sure whether or not SEA students with disabilities should go to school, and one quarter of them, are not convinced that they can learn, but a large proportion of parents believe that gifted and talented children should also receive special education.

7. The knowledge of more languages and education provides Southeast Asians greater depth and perspective. Those who know only one language and are uneducated, are likely to hold on to their traditional beliefs and fears, and perhaps be unable to see the educational needs of their children with disabilities. Their views are more inflexible and parochial.

8. A large proportion of participants are unaware of the kinds of special educational services available to SEA children with disabilities. Large number of parents are not familiar with the concept of special education and they do not have enough information to know what the school is doing with their children with disabilities.

9. Teachers and parents are willing to work together and learn more about special education in America.

The findings of this research fill in numerous gaps that exist in the current research literature, and importantly, the result seem to concur with other studies done by other researchers, namely Harry (1992), Mercer (1972), Cummins (1984), Dao et al (1985) and others who focused on different cultural and linguistic groups.

I. BACKGROUND

a. Introduction

Scholars and practitioners have come to the conclusion that families play a major role in shaping their children's education. The family exercises an influence on a number of aspects of children's functioning and the need of family participation is even more critical to prepare minority students for successful academic achievement. Schools need to incorporate parents and the culture of the home as an integral part of the instructional plan. (Delgado-Gaitan 1990, p 1).

The premise of this study is, that there is a strong relationship between the perception that Southeast Asian (SEA) parents and teachers have of children with disabilities and their view about the need for, and efficacy of special education intervention.

The research conducted under this grant was focused on the exploration of the underlying feelings that Southeast Asian parents and teachers have about a) children with disabilities and b) special education intervention in American schools. This study is an effort to provide some of the missing research that supports effective education of these linguistically and culturally diverse children with disabilities.

The challenge to effectively educate these new arrivals, cannot be met even by the most committed teacher or school system, if they do not have the research based knowledge that affects the educational beliefs that underlie and mold the perception of Southeast Asians, regarding children with disabilities and special education intervention, as is required by local, state and federal mandates in USA.

This research study was grounded in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, Beth Harry's and (1992) Jean Mercer's (1972) studies. They provided a framework for examining the role that socio-cultural factors plays in education, and in this case how these elements affect the formation of Southeast Asian parents' and teachers' conception relative to children with disabilities, and their understanding or conflicting interpretation of the concept of disability due to cross-cultural-historical misunderstanding.

The activities delineated by the researchers at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, College of Education, were guided by the following research questions:

a) What kind of cultural, social and other variables (external to the quality of service provided) influence individual Southeast Asian parents' and teachers' perceptions of children with disabilities, and special education intervention in American schools?

b) What are the commonalties and unique characteristics that affect both positively and negatively the teaching / learning process of Cambodian students with disabilities?

c) What relationships exist between demographic variables such as gender, age group, number of languages spoken, educational level and the surveyed attitudinal responses of SEA parents and teachers?

d) How do the learning/ teaching strategies for Cambodians with disabilities, differ from other language minority students in order to achieve greater efficacy in their education?

In order to validate effective educational practices and to foster new or improved approaches in special education, it is necessary to have an appropriate knowledge base, that in this case comes from exploratory research. For this purpose, data was collected from Southeast Asian (SEA) parents and teachers by means of a survey designed specifically for this study with 50 items, and complemented by a case study in which twelve parents and two teachers were selected to participate to explore further their perceptions. The data was statistically analyzed and interpreted to find trends, relationships and other significant, relevant and unique characteristics.

b. Who are Southeast Asians (SEA).

A diverse group of people, who came from different places in the Orient, who have different language, different cultural experiences, undergoing different challenges, and having different citizenship status in this country, though seems apparently on the surface, having

a common identity, are called Asian Americans or Asian Pacific Islander.

These two terms have been popularized at the time of the Civil Rights movement and the enactment of the Immigration Act in 1965 (Uba 1994. p. 1). The generic denomination of Asian Americans or Asian Pacific Islander comprise 25 different groups among them are included: Asian Indian, Cambodians, Chinese, Filipino, Guamanies, Hawaiian, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Thai, Samoan, Vietnamese, etc.

Under the Southeast Asian designation are commonly included, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, Thai and Vietnamese. This group started arriving to this country as a refugees from the Vietnam War beginning in 1975, and they constitute the largest group admited to this country, (surpassing Cubans) with about 1,071,500 refugees who resettled in many USA territories and the East and West cost. The states where there is more concentration of Southeast Asians SEA refugees are: California, New York, Washington, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia and Minnesota. The SEA population for most part remained stable. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1993. p. 52).

Traditional cultural values of Southeast Asians are grounded in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Althought these values and cultures are deemed to evolve constantly, they are powerful influences that moldes their personality, perception and attitudes. Laura Uba in hers book citing the work of Abbot; Caplan,Withmore & Choy; Union Pan Asian Communities, Goldstein, Kitano & Kikumuru; Chew & Ogi: Fong; Payton,Young , Shon & Ja, Yu & Kim and others (Uba 1994. pgs. 15, 17, 29, 37) indicate some of the manifested traditional values such as maintenance of harmony in relationships, prevalence of the group over individual interest, precedence of duties over rights, fullfilment of obligations particulary to family members, discipline, conformity, reserve, reticence, deference, humility, withhold of feelings, as well as, respect for authority and status of elders and teachers.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is based in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, The underpinning in addition, represents a modified version of Jean Mercer's (1972) study that examined the role that socio-cultural factors plays in education, and more recently Beth Harry's (1992) research of parent's opinions about special education. Although both Mercer and Harry focused on Hispanics, their conceptualization is relevant for examining other cultural and linguistic groups, because both studies focuses on education as it is related to linguistic minorities. Traditionally parents place great value on education, however, their knowledge about what actually goes on in the American schools may be minimal (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987). Studies done in the area of special education indicate that there are no parallels between the families, home, country, and the cultural meaning attached to the concept of disability, as it is in USA. Furthermore, Harry focusing on the mismatch of cross-cultural misunderstanding, highlights the role that teachers play in helping language minority parents to understand the meaning of the concept of special education and its intent under the law:

> "...unless professionals working with culturally different parents can find effective means of ensuring a shared understanding of the meaning of special education... the intent of the law will be seriously undermined" (p. 27)

These models have been selected also, because they provide a framework for analyzing the perception of Southeast Asian parents and teachers, allowing us to view the individual within a larger context. In other words, this model will provide a mechanism for examining the internalization of cultural-historical influences in Southeast Asian parents' and teachers' conception of children with disabilities and their understanding of special education intervention in the child educational process, as required by local, state and federal mandates in the American schools. Exploring the perception that parents and teachers have, will help to understand, the determinants of their personal attitude, tendencies, values, patterns of behavior, etc. that for Vygotsky according to Davydov (1995), it lie in the historically

developing culture. "The assimilation by a person of historical values and...culture, takes place in society, carry out of personal activity in collaboration with other people"(p 15). Human personality for Vygotsky has specific cultural-historical content and form, and its development takes place during "changes in the social situation of a person's life or during changes in the types and kinds of personal activity." (p.15).

Parents upbringing their children, traditionally determine what they should know in order to be an able individual in society. Child rearing practices often reflects parents' cultural values. Education for Vygoksky includes teaching / learning and upbringing to develop the children personality (Daviydov 1995).

The proposed framework, however, moves beyond Mercer's and Harry's models to include ethnographic factors, as well as, attitudes, traditions, background, etc. unique to Southeast Asians, and particularly to the Cambodian community living in two cities in Massachusetts. In this study we have assumed that these variables are external to the teachers' education and that, they directly or indirectly influence their (both Southeast Asians parents and teachers) conflicting interpretation of the concept of disability due to cross-cultural conflict and historical misunderstanding.

We hypothesize that it is the relationship of historical, cultural factors that parents and teachers bring with them from their native country, that lead them to have in this case a particular perception about education. Ultimately, we proposed the historical, cultural-educative context model as a framework for designing and interpreting our research, although, not necessarily as a causal model to be rigorously tested. In proposing this model, we acknowledge two assumptions underlying the framework. One, being the relationships between the articulated variables that are complex, and two, that certain variables contribute more than others to relationships. The nature of those variables and their precise contribution are still relatively unknown.

Finally, the researchers do not pretend, that the findings of this hermeneutic study is going to provide the whole picture about

Southeast Asian parents of children with disabilities, rather through the responses from the participants, we expect to be able to look for patterns.

III. METHODOLOGY

Sample and Setting

This study was conducted in two cities in Massachusetts, one of them only second to Long Beach, California in terms of large concentration of Southeast Asians. The study focuses on five areas:

a) General demographics
b) Schooling of Southeast Asian children and special education,
c) Influences in the perception of disabilities
d) Awareness and knowledge of special education and
e) Role in the education of Southeast Asian children with disabilities/ Effectiveness.

The section on ***General Demographics*** provides information regarding the profile of participants. One hundred (100) parents and thirty one (31) bilingual Southeast Asian teachers took part, voluntarily in this study, followed by a case study of twelve parents and two teachers. In the area of ***Schooling of SEA Children and Special Education***, we investigate the sense that Southeast Asians have regarding schooling of their children with disabilities. In the third section, ***Influences in the Perception of Disabilities***, we examine what kind of cultural, historical and other variables (external to the quality of service provided) influence individual Southeast Asian parents' and teachers' perception of children with disabilities, as well as the special education intervention in American schools. In the section on ***Awareness and Knowledge of Special Education***, we explore the degree of information that Southeast Asians have regarding disabilities, special education intervention and related areas. Finally, in the section under the title ***Role in the education of SEA Children with Disabilities / Effectiveness***, we investigate the commonalties, unique elements and characteristics that affect the learning process of Southeast Asian children with disabilities.

Preliminary research was conducted with the purpose of assisting in the development and selection of the survey items and variables, which were to be used in the interview protocol and to have a valid procedure, and to use during the study. For this purpose the method utilized was analysis of items, rewriting, coding and comparison of pilot study variables.

In qualitative research, establishing the goodness of the data is very important. To this effect, several techniques were used, such as **triangulation,** in which we obtained feedback from various participants, regarding determinate aspects or issues of concern presented. Another technique used was **peer debriefing** in which researchers met and discussed the data and reviewed procedures and findings.

Using this as a base, the results of the preliminary research allowed us to develop a survey packet to explore and measure the variables that contribute to Southeast Asian teachers' and parents' perception regarding children with disabilities, and special education intervention in American schools. The survey was conducted in two cities in Massachusetts, both confronting inner-city problems, one of them with a large concentration of Southeast Asians-mainly Cambodians.

Concurrent with the large-scale survey of Southeast Asian parents and teachers, profiles were established using a recently implemented statistical data base provided by the school systems. These profiles helped to form the basis of the study to determine the perception that teachers and parents have of children with disabilities, and special education intervention in this country.

Statistical analysis of the data collected by the survey questionnaires was conducted to examine which variables from the conceptual framework were associated with teachers' and parents' perceptions. The answers and comments to the open question section of the survey were coded according the type of information provided, that later on were compared to categorize the data.

Correlation analysis between quantitative and ordinal scale variables was conducted to examine the degree and type of inter-

relatedness, rather than to specifically assess the significance level, especially given the sample size of teachers (n=31) and parents (n=100), are both relatively small and, that the focus of this study is on exploratory research.

Chi square analysis was conducted to examine the interrelationships using the variables of gender, age and educational level, cross-tabulated with specific items. This test was utilized because of the nature of the instrument items' which are of ordinal and categorical data types, and to explore any statistically significant associations.

A case study using an ethnographic approach complemented the survey. This phase of the study involved structured and unstructured interviews, ranging from 20 minutes to several hours in lenght. These meeting and observations were conducted in the subject's native language at their homes, in which twelve parents and two teachers participated to further explore their perceptions. Most of the interviews were with mothers. Answers, coments and notes were recorded inmediately after each visit.

IV. FINDINGS

a. TEACHERS RESPONSES

1. General Demographics

1.1 Profile

A total of 30 Southeast Asian Bilingual teachers participated in the survey; the gender composition of the participants was 51.7% female and 48.3% male. Some 40% concentrated around ages of 20 to 40, followed by the age group of 40 to 50 with 33.3%. However, there is a small group 10% of younger (in their 20s) teachers and 16.7% older than 50 years of age.

The race composition of the participants is mainly Cambodian 74.2%, followed by Laotians 16.1% with Vietnamese representing 9.7%.

A large percentage of the participants 26.7% have been living in USA for 10 years, while 13.3% have lived here for 12 years, 20% for 13 years and some 23.2% have lived in USA between 14 and 20 years.

All the teachers participating in the study have attended school in their native country, and 38.5% obtained college degrees. The rest finished secondary or elementary education (12.9%) in their native country. More than half of them, 55.2% continued their education in this country and received their Bachelor's degree. In addition, all the participants are fluent in their native language and English, while almost half of them 45% have command of (at least) a third language. In 80% of the families, the head of the house is the father. However in 12% of the cases, mothers are also the head of the household. In 8% of the cases, older brothers and /or sisters are also heads of the household.

The range of the number of people living at home is between 1 and 8 and the average size of the family is approximately 4.1 members. The average number of female individuals in the family is 2.0 and, 2.1 for males. The range for females is from 0 to 4 individuals and from 1 to 5 for males. In the study we also have found that the average number of children per family is 1.6 and the range of the number of children is from 0 to 6. The average number of adult members in the families is 2.4 and the range varies from 0 to 7.
The average number of children that participants have is 2.1 and the range of number of children varies from 0 to 8. The average number of children going to school is 1.5 and ranges from 0 to 5.

2. Schooling of SEA Children and Special Education.

In addition to having their own special needs children, 10.3% of the participants also teach students that are in need of special education. The range of the number of special needs students varies from 1 to 17. The average number of special needs children per classes is 2.9, and this is in addition to regular bilingual Southeast Asian children attending classes.

The Southeast Asian participant teachers indicated that 4% of their special education students are confronting health related problems, 11.5% mental problems, 19.2% physical handicap. In addition they believe that 25% could be considered gifted and talented.

When participants asked about their feelings about schools, an overwhelmingly majority 93.1%, said they have good or very good feelings, but when asked about whether or not they had confronted problems with special education, more than half of them, 51.6% said that they are concerned with their own preparation to teach special education students. They are, somehow, expected to teach special education as the local school system has recently adopted an inclusionary model for educating special needs students.

Some problems that special need students confront, that were identified by the participants, are as follows: with respect to special education services (25.9%), problems with other teachers (16.1%), with bilingual teachers (9.7%), with special education teachers (9.7%) with transportation (9.7%), with the administration (9.7%), and with ESL teachers (6.5%).

Participants appreciated the efforts of the school system to provide special education services for Southeast Asian (SEA) children with disabilities, however the experience that these Southeast Asian teachers have regarding the quality of special education services varies as 37.% believe that the services offered are between average and good. Although 7.4 % think that the services are very bad, and 18.6% said the opposite, that *special education is very good.*

SEA teachers also indicated that they like the quality of some teachers who help students learn, and the role model that they represent, as well as the efforts to integrate multicultural views into the school curriculum.

To the question: *What you don't like about special education services*, only half of the participants responded, but amongst those

who responded there was a concern regarding the length of the special education placement process, that is necessary to endure. The service, in view of some, is deficient, and lacking well trained bilingual professionals able to communicate in the native language of Southeast Asians.

3. Influences in the perception of disabilities.

Participants strongly agree (64.5 %) or strongly agree (32.2%) that cultural factors influence their perception of education in American schools. They believe also that traditional-historical factors influence their perception (58.1 % agree and 35.5 % strongly agree with this idea).

As a result of the correlation analysis, a moderate positive correlation (r=.66) was found between items 20 (*Cultural factors*) and 21 (*Historical factors*), which indicates that there is a moderate relationship between agreement level of cultural and historical factors influencing Southeast Asians perception of education in American schools. The agreement / disagreement of "*cultural factors*" as an effect, is associated with similar agreement / disagreement that *"historical factors"* are involved.

Cultural values, such as, religion, traditional celebrations, morality, respect, concept of family loyalty and trust, cooperation and harmony, as well as language skills, are some of the aspects that participants indicated as important and influencing their perception of education in this country. Also they believe that in American schools there is too much freedom that is affecting the behavior and discipline of students both at school and at home.

Because of Southeast Asians religion and cultural tradition, they believe that educational activity is solely the responsibility of teachers, whom they feel have total authority over the children education, deserving absolute respect. The religious, cultural, and traditional background is the basis for their conception about the nature of the education, which is portray from their native land into this new

adopted country. In other words, they strongly believe that still, this is the way that education should be, also in this country.

In addition, the effects of the war that is affecting their historical past, seems that have modified their behavior, as their freedom was suppressed and the questioning of authority was not only discouraged, but punished. Perhaps, this is the reason why they think that there is too much freedom and that it is affecting school activities. This traumatic experience is in many cases the determinant factor contributing to parents' ability to have effective parental participation in the school and other related educational activities. Traditionally, students were not supposed to express their ideas or opinions openly in the Southeast Asian culture.

Through their responses Southeast Asian teachers, revealed that their cultural background is a strong force that molded their behavior and way of thinking, in addition to socioeconomic, linguistic and educational differences. (Rosado 1994). It was also found that the process of acculturation is creating in many instances, a state of confusion and contrast. This process of acculturation unfortunately takes place much slowly for adults that for children. Facing cultural and linguistic barriers is harder for adults, not only because of age, but because many confront problems associated with economic and difficult living conditions, in addition to the traumatic experience of displacement from their native country and history of war. The consequence of all of these is perhaps why many Southeast Asian families have the sense of alienation and possibly isolation from the American society.

There is a feeling that, amongst Southeast Asians, that the more education that one has, the more respect that they deserve. This sentiment could explain why they feel that teachers should receive a great deal of respect. Their perception about education in this country is in many ways, in conflict with the expectations that they may have had at home. Their apprehension is also influenced by the idea, that students here have too much freedom, many times resulting in lack of

discipline at school, that is in contrast with their cultural values for restrain and discipline, all of these in addition of assuming their obligations and responsibilities in school and at home.

Teachers have the sense that their traditional and cultural background, in many ways are being deluded or lost in this new adopted society. Another of the beliefs that Southeast Asians families cherish more is cooperation and harmony, that is perhaps the reason why Southeast Asian believe in maintaining a pleasant attitude, being polite and not challenging or competing with others; not the individual but the family is the basis of Southeast Asian society. Southeast Asian teachers, in their responses made known, that it is rooted in their tradition that Southeast Asian parents value education highly and want their children receiving a good education.

Of the group of Southeast Asian teachers who participated in the study, 61.3 % strongly agree and 19.4 % agree that Southeast Asian children with disabilities should attend school, and almost all of them (90.3%) believe that they can learn. A large number (83.9%) agree that SEA students who are gifted and talented should receive special education. Nearly one third of participants (29.%) think that only members of the family should know about their children having mental or physical disabilities, however, approximately two thirds of them (64.6%) think just the opposite.

Close to one third of participants (32.3%) believe that having children with disabilities is the influence of *bad spirits*, and a small percentage stated that *destiny* (9.7%) or *witchcraft* (6.6%) is the reason. However, approximately one quarter of the participants (22.6%) are ambivalent about this question, and about half (51.6%) disagree about the influence of *bad spirits*. Around two thirds (71%) disagree about *witchcraft* and one third or (29%) disagree about *destiny and fate*. These seems to be that are embedded in the Southeast Asian's Karma belief, where present life is predetermined by good or bad deeds in previous life.

The statistical analysis concerning these beliefs shows a moderate correlation (r= .60) between item 23 *(only members of the family should know having children with disabilities)* and item 24 *(having children with disabilities is the influence of bad spirits)* and between items 24 and 25 *(Children with disabilities is due to the influence of witchcraft)* (r= .66). The interpretation of these interrelationships indicates that those who feel more strongly that having children with disabilities is due to the influence of *bad spirits,* are more likely to feel that only family members should know about that disability. Also, there is a likelihood that there is a similar agreement level between *bad spirits and witchcraft* being an influence on children with disabilities. On the other hand, Southeast Asian teachers who are more likely to disagree that *destiny and fate* (item 26) are linked with disabilities, are also more likely to disagree that *witchcraft* (item 25) has an influence (r= .57) on disabilities.

The opinion of participants is equally divided, (41.9%) regarding whether or not Southeast Asian children with disabilities are discriminated against. Some 16.1 % do not have a clear opinion in this matter. Almost half of them (48.3%) believe that people are prejudiced against Southeast Asian children with disabilities. Although some 29% are ambivalent about prejudice, the rest of them (22.6%) disagree with this idea.

Finally, by Chi square analysis there was a significant relationships in agreement score (p=.02) between those who know fewer languages and those who know more languages with regard to item 34 *(Parents should assist educating their children with disabilities).* Those teachers who are isolated in their own single language are unable to see the educational needs of their children with disabilities, and their views are more inflexible and parochial.

4. <u>Awareness and Knowledge of Special Education.</u>

Almost half of the teachers participating in the study (45.2%) believe that the special education services provided to Southeast

Asians in general should be different from what is currently offered, in contrast, about one quarter of them (25.8%) think that current special education services should remain the same. Almost half of them (48.39%) do not know what their school is doing with Southeast Asian children who have disabilities, or they (46.7%) do not know what kind of special education services are available to Southeast Asians. Concerning this item, when a Chi square analysis was conducted to examine the inter-relationships with age it was found that there is significant relationship (p= .013) between age group with item 38 *(knowledge that they have about special education services available to Southeast Asians)*. The older the age group, the greater the likelihood that they won' t know about the availability of special education services; conversely the younger the age group is, the greater is the likelihood that they will know what kind of special education services are available to Southeast Asian students. Their feelings in this regard perhaps are stronger because they have spent several years in this country, especially in Massachusetts where special education is mandatory.

Participants think that teachers themselves (96.8%) need to learn more about this subject matter because more than half (54.9%) of the teachers never received any training in special education. Respondents felt that this learning should not only be limited to teachers, as 96.8% felt the parents also need to learn about special education. The Chi square analysis shows that there is a significant relationship (p= .035) between education level in USA and training received in special education (item 37). The greater the education level in USA, the greater the likelihood that they would have had training.

Interesting moderate correlation were found (r= .75) between agreement /disagreement levels for items 30 *(SEA teachers should help parents to understand what is special education)* and 31 *(SEA teachers should learn more about special education);* a similar correlation (r= .48) was found between item 30 and 32 *(SEA parents should learn more about special education)* and between items 31 and 32 as well (r= .64).

The overall interpretation is that the strong agreement that teachers should educate parents about special education, is associated with strong agreement that teachers should first educate themselves before educating parents about special education

5. Role in the Education of Children with Disabilities / Effectiveness.

The large majority of Southeast Asian teachers (90.3%) think that they would like to help parents understand what special education is all about, and almost all the participants (93.6%) believe that parents should assist in educating their children with disabilities since, parents like to keep their children close to family, to help as they learn. Southeast Asian family structure is based on community, where usually members of the extended family live together, as well as, several generations, where strong and affluent members of the family suppose to support the ones who need more. Frequently children live with parents until they get married. Since it is in their tradition to value education, the respondents indicated that they would like to have well trained bilingual special education teachers who can communicate in their native language with parents and students. In their responses these Southeast Asian bilingual teachers register their concern regarding the need to receive more support form the administration to reduce the students teacher ration, as they think that these students can learn better in small groups, with an appropriate curriculum.

These Southeast Asian teachers believe that parents also can help special education students learn but, they think that parents first need training to learn more about special education. Another way to help these students learn is by establishing after school tutoring in academic and other areas, including morals and ethics.

The barriers indicated by the participants that are prevents students from learning include many times, misplacement of Southeast Asian students in special education programs because of their English language proficiency rather than disability. This

misplacement creates over-representation, and/or premature mainstreaming of students with special needs.

Teachers also think that the lower expectation that others have about Southeast Asian students' achievement in schools is due to their lower English proficiency, ignoring that it is a consequence of the second language developmental process that students are experiencing. Another barrier is the lack of Bilingual Southeast Asian special education teachers, as well as, the lack of parental supervision at home, which includes allowing children to watch too much TV at expense of their homework.

The large size of the classes is also preventing these Southeast Asian students with disabilities from receiving individualized attention and learning properly, especially when the concepts presented to them is often too sophisticated to master. This situation makes necessary to switch from a teacher oriented classes to student oriented, and requires teachers to adapt the curriculum material, in an attempt to meet students' needs.

Southeast Asian bilingual teachers think that in order to better educate Southeast Asian children with disabilities, it is necessary to have bilingual Southeast Asian teachers who are well trained in special education and able to gain administrative support. They also believe that knowing how to utilize in a team teaching approach will help.

To efficiently educate children with disabilities, Southeast Asian teachers think that it is necessary to adapt methods and materials to fit the special needs of these children, and also to educate parents about the American education system, particularly about parents' and children's educational rights.

Southeast Asian teachers believe that parents need to learn English to establish better communication and to work in close cooperation with the school. Ramirez's findings (1990) point out that the lack of involvement is due to their difficult living conditions

and/or lack of English skills. It is also a perceived by these teachers that parents need to learn more about the concept of special education as it is understood here, about the delivery of services offered in special education for their children, as well as, how to help their children at home with school work, especially when Southeast Asians traditionally trust, that education is solely the responsibility of teachers and schools. As Volk states ..."parents maintain a respectful distance from teachers...perhaps supporting them but not teaching their children themselves" (1990, p.90).

Participant teachers think that American schools should provide the necessary and appropriate services in special education that meet the needs of Southeast Asian children with disabilities. This should be done, they believe, with the assistance of well trained bilingual special education teachers. They consider that it is necessary to create a positive environment to prevent isolation and discrimination. It is also necessary in their conception, to develop awareness and sensitivity toward diversity especially as it pertains to Southeast Asians.

Teachers believe, that it is essential to educate Southeast Asian teachers and families in the concept of special education as well as to provide better support in terms of qualified personnel, teaching materials, and services to meet the specific needs of SEA students with disabilities.

6. Teacher's Summary

As a result of the statistical analysis of the data collected, we found that gender has no significant relationship to any of the assessment variables. With respect to age group, this variable was found to have a significant relationship with knowledge of special education programs/needs. Younger teachers were more likely to have greater awareness of special education. Education level in USA was found to have a significant relationship with level of special education training received. Higher education levels are associated with greater training in special education. For the variable of number of languages spoken, a significant relationship was found between number of

languages and the knowledge about special education services available. Those who were conversant in more than one language had greater knowledge than monolingual teachers.

A summary of the findings of the variables dimensions established by our exploratory study, regarding Southeast Asians' perceptions of disabilities and especial education intervention follows:

Schooling / Special Education of SEA Children

1. The major interest that Southeast Asian teachers have, when referring to children with special needs is the education of gifted and talented students, their second concern is the physically handicapped children, and lastly the education of children with mental problems.

2. Over 90% of the Southeast Asian teachers have a positive feeling about the school in which they work, but over 50% feel inadequately prepared to teach special education students.

3. Large number of Southeast Asian teachers were concerned about the length of time that the special education placement process takes.

4. The assessment of these teachers is that, there are few native language special education teachers available to assist Southeast Asian students with special needs.

Factors Affecting Perception of Disabilities

1. SEA teachers feel that their historical and cultural traditions affect the way they perceive education in USA.

2. Almost all the SEA teachers interviewed are confident that children with disabilities can learn in school.

3. It is also evident, based on the comments of Southeast Asian teachers in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, that there is a pervasive feeling, that many teachers in American schools are not respected by the students and others, and that, their authority should be more strong and unquestioned.

4. Teachers who responded to the survey feel there is absence of discipline in school and home for many students. They believe that these numerous behavioral problems negatively affect the children's learning activity.

5. Southeast Asians teachers indicated, that is not in their culture and tradition, that parents be direct participants in the formal education of their children in school.

6. More than half of the SEA teachers disagree with the idea that only members of the family should know if one has a children with disabilities.

7. Younger SEA teachers are more likely to believe that Southeast Asian students with disabilities are often subject of discrimination.

8. SEA teachers ascertain that proficiency in more than one language, assist them in having a greater flexibility and depth of understanding, as well as, a wider perception of educational issues in general.

Awareness and Knowledge of Special Education

1. About half of the teachers surveyed were unaware of what kinds of special education services are available to their Southeast Asian students. Younger teachers seem to be more knowledgeable of such services.

2. Almost all the Southeast Asian teachers surveyed, feel that they should receive training in special education, and that they should use this training to educate parents, so they can work more effectively

and together as a team. Again younger teachers are more likely to have had some training to serve special needs children.

Both of these findings substantiates the need for Southeast Asian teachers to receive in-service training, which will make all of these teachers more knowledgeable about special education issues. This training is even more crucial for older Southeast Asian teachers, because the more education those teachers receive the greater the likelihood that both parents and teachers will get involved in education. This collaboration will result in a higher expectation of educational services for their children with disabilities.

Role/ Effectiveness in Educating Children with Disabilities.

1. Nearly all SEA teachers responded that parents should assist in the education of children with disabilities.

2. There is perceived need for well trained bilingual special education teachers who can not only teach efficiently, but able to establish communications links between the school and home. Among the suggestions made by SEA teachers to enhance home school relations were the formation of small groups in classrooms and after school programs.

3. A number of surveyed teachers feel that many Southeast Asian students who have some proficiency in English are mainstreamed too quickly, without any regard for potential learning problems that may become apparent in the standard curriculum classes. It was stated that often there is a generally lower expectation for Southeast Asian students due to their English language skills.

4. They believe that effectiveness of special education services could be attained by having well prepared bilingual special education teachers, as well as, more parental participation, and family supervision.

5. Southeast Asian teachers perceived the need to create a more positive learning environment for Southeast Asian children with disabilities, in order to produce achievement and to prevent discrimination and isolation.

b. PARENTS RESPONSE

1. General Demographics

1.1 Profile

A total of 100 Southeast Asian (SEA) parents living in two cities in Massachusetts voluntarily participated in the study. The gender composition of the participants was 52.5% female and 47.5% male, one individual omitted the answer. Approximately half (46.9%) of the Southeast Asian parents surveyed concentrated around the age group of 30 to 40, more than a quarter of them (27.1%) were in the age group of 41 to 50 and the rest 18.8% were older than 50 years of age. Nevertheless, there is a small group 7.9% of younger (in their 20s). The race composition of all the participants is Cambodian

More than half of Cambodian parents (54.2 %) have been living in this country between 9 to 11 years, and out of that group, approximately one fifth of the participants (22.9%) have been living in USA for 10 years. the rest (25 %) between 2 to 7 years and 19.8% have been living in USA between 12 and 15 years. More than half of the participants in the study (55%) still speak only Khmer, the rest (45%) are bilingual, proficient in Khmer and somewhat in English.

Half of the Southeast Asian parents (50.4%) who participated in the study have attended school in their native country between 4 and 7 years, and 8.9% indicated that they never attended school; however, there are some that attended school up to 8 years, and very few went beyond that. When these Southeast Asian parents arrived to this

country, about 43% tried to continue their education for 1 year, but some of them, went beyond that initial year.

Throughout the survey, we found out that for the Khmer families, the head of the household is equally divided between fathers (48.5%) and the mothers (48.5%). In some cases (2.0%) older brothers and grandparents (1%) are also the head of the household. This situation is way above the national norms. According the US Census the percent distribution in 1993 for male Asian and Pacific Islanders householder is 5.6 % and for female is 12.3%.

Large numbers of the Southeast Asian parents in the study (71.9%) are currently unemployed, the rest (28.1%) are employed. The range of the number of people living at home is between 1 and 12 and the average size of the family is approximately 5.7 members. The average number of female individuals in the family is 2.9 and for males is 2.8. The range for number of females is from 1 to 7 and for males is from 0 to 8. Regarding the proportion of children and adults, we have found that the average number of children per family is 3.5 and the range of the number of children is from 1 to 7; the average number of adult members in the families is 2.3 and the range varies from 1 to 9. The average number of children that participant families have is 3.7 and the range is from 0 to 8.

2. Schooling of SEA Children and Special Education

The average number of Southeast Asian children attending school is 3.0 and it ranges from 0 to 7. The percentage of children of Southeast Asian families who participated in the study and who are enrolled in special education is 13.1%.

To the question *"Do you have children with problems"* (item 14), they indicated that 9% are due to health problems, 6.9% due to mental health, 7% due to physical problems. They are also concerned about having *"very smart "* gifted and talented children (47.5%) who,

because of their innate curiosity, could be considered to be causing problems.

Some parents (13.8%) indicated that they have confronted in the past many different problems with the schools, and these problems are categorized as follow: *Transportation* (13.8%), *School administration* (10.3%), *special education services* (8%), *problems with teachers* (4.7%), *with other students* (2.3%).

Parents rate their experience as a positive, regarding the quality of special education services, about half of them (46.5%) said that it is *"good"* and more than one third (34.9%) stated that *it* is *"very good"*. A small group (4.6%) declared that it *"is bad /very bad "* and 14.0% were ambivalent about the quality of special education. Regarding their *experience with schools,* Southeast Asian parents indicated that they had encountered good and bad ones, some of the good are the fact that they have in schools Southeast Asian teachers, that they know their culture, traditions and can speak their language. Another good experience is to know, that Southeast Asian teachers are using two languages in their classes, all of these stimulate students and parents to work together. Among the bad experiences, is the inability many times, to communicate with school personnel, the absence of qualified Southeast Asian bilingual special educators and the lack of discipline of children in school.

3. Influences in the Perception of Disabilities

When participants where asked as to their feelings about their schools, overwhelmingly 86.3% responded, saying that they have *"good* or *very good feelings"* about their school.

More than half (57.8%) of the participants agree (33.7%) or strongly agree (24.1%) respectively, that tradition and cultural factor influence their perception of education in American schools, and more than one third are not sure. Regarding the influence of historical occurrences affecting their perception of education, half (50.6%) of

them agree or strongly agree with this idea, and almost the other half are not clear about that.

As a result of the correlation analysis, a moderate positive correlation (r=.57) was found between items 20 *cultural factors* and 21 *historical factors* which indicates that there is a relationship between agreement level of cultural, traditional historical factors influencing Southeast Asians perception toward education in American schools. Thus the agreement / disagreement of *cultural factors* as an effect on their perception, is associated with similar agreement / disagreement that *historical factors* have in the formation of such perception.

Of the group of Southeast Asian parents who participated in the study, approximately one half or (43%) are not sure whether or not Southeast Asian children with disabilities should attend school. However, 46.8 % agree or strongly agree that these children with disabilities should attend school, and the majority (77.3%) believe that they can learn well. About 10% of the participant parents think that children with disabilities do not need to go to school, and 1.4% think that they can not learn. A large proportion of parents (71.6%) also agree that SEA students who are gifted and talented should receive special education, the rest (16%) are ambivalent or disagree (12.3%) with this idea.

Nearly one half of the participants (45.6%) think that only members of the family should know about their children having mental or physical disabilities. However, approximately one fifth of them (19.3%) think just the opposite. The rest (35.%) are indeterminate as to whether or not it should be kept secret within the family.

More than one quarter of participants (27.3%) believe that having children with disabilities is the influence of *destiny or fate*, but a large proportion of them, are not sure that *destiny / fate* (49.4%), *witchcraft* (59%) or *bad spirits* (55.7%) are the reason that some children have disabilities. About one third disagreed with these ideas, only 27.3% believe in *destiny or fate*, 16.4 in *bad spirits*, and 9% in *witchcraft* . The Chi-Square analysis using the variable of age group

yielded a significant relationship with this item (p= .049), younger parents have less agreement with the believe in*destiny/fate* .

The statistical analysis concerning these beliefs, shows a moderate correlation (r= .55) between item 24 *(having children with disabilities is the influence of bad spirits),* and 25 *(Children with disabilities is due to the influence of witchcraft).* A significant relationship (p=.012) was found between this item and age group. Younger parents had less disagreement with this than older parents. Similar moderate correlation(r= .66) was found between items 25 and 26 *(Destiny and fate are the reason to have children with disabilities).* The interpretation of these interrelationships indicates that those who feel more strongly that having children with disabilities is due to the influence of *bad spirits,* are more likely to feel that disabilities in children are due to the influence of *witchcraft.* Also, there is a likelihood that there is a similar agreement level between *witchcraft* and *destiny/fate* as having an influence on children's disabilities. On the other hand, Southeast Asian parents who are more likely to disagree that *destiny and fate* (item 26) are linked with disabilities, are also likely to disagree that *witchcraft* (item 25) has an influence (r= .57) on disabilities.

The opinion of participants are divided regarding the idea of whether or not Southeast Asian children with disabilities are *discriminated against,* as about one third (32.5%) believe that they are *discriminated against,* and another 25% think that they are not. A large proportion (42%) do not have a clear opinion in this matter. Regarding the idea of *prejudice* against Southeast Asian children with disabilities, we have found that approximately one third of Southeast Asian parents (30%) believe that people are not prejudiced against Southeast Asian children with disabilities, and only 8.3% disagree with this idea, although close to one half 43.2% are ambivalent about *prejudice.* A significant relationship (p=.015) between age group and item 28 *(SEA children with disabilities are often discriminated against).* Younger parents have agreater agreement with this tha older parents. Age group also was found to be significantly associated (p=.003) with item 29

(People are prejudiced against SEA children with disabilities). Here again, younger parents had greater agreement with this issue.

Almost half of the Southeast Asian parents (45.6%) think that children with disabilities are not *neglected* however, more that one quarter (25.3%) believe that they are *neglected.* 24.1% concur with the idea that they are also *abused.* but 40.5% consider that they are not. In both cases, there is a sizable group, (between 29% to 35%) that are ambivalent about these ideas. A significant relationship (p= .036) was found between age group and item 35 *(SEA childen with disabilities are often abused).* Younger parents agreed at a high level than older parents with respect to this matter.

To the question of *seclusion* of Southeast Asian children with disabilities, a large proportion of parents that participated in the survey (60.8%) disagree with this proposition, and 27.8% are unclear about their position, only 11.4% think that they should be secluded. This item 36 *(SEA children with disabilities should be secluded)* in the relationship with the variable of gender yielded one significant result (p= .008), female parents had less disagreement with respect to this variable. This item 36 was also found to be significantly related with age group (p= .000), younger parents were in greater agreement with the statement about seclusion.

A large number of parents (60%) think than these children cannot not be prepared to *live independently* and 27.8% are ambivalent about this proposition. Regarding the idea that Southeast Asian children with disabilities should be *able to work,* 49.4% of the parents would like their children be able to work, however, about one fifth (20.8%) disagree and approximately one third (30%) are unclear about whether or not they should be able to work. Age group was found to have a significant association (p= .021) with item 37 *(SEA children with disabilities should be prepared to live independently).* Younger parents indicated greater agreement with this statement than older ones.
In this regard, the idea here is perhaps that, Southeast Asian parents would prefer keeping their children with disabilities close to them at

home. The tendency to keep their children at home is five times higher for Asian Americans families that there is for the total population (Population Reference Bureau, Feb. 1991, p.9) The difficult leaving conditions and the lack of English skills could be additional reasons (Ramirez 1990).

4. Awareness and Knowledge of Special Education.

A significant proportion (78.7%) of Southeast Asian parents that participated in the survey think that they, themselves, need to learn more about special education.

A large proportion (66%) of the Southeast Asian parents in the study, said that they do *not know at all,* what Southeast Asian children with disabilities are doing in school, whereas 13% know a *little* and 10.5% know *some.* The surveyed parents also indicated that 63.9% of them *know nothing* about special education, while 6% know a *little* and 7.2% know *some.* A similar situation was found regarding the kind of special education services offered; large number of Southeast Asian parents (79%) *do not know what is available,* 13.5% know a *little* and 3.7% *know some* about the special education offerings. These finding are consistent with the research of Zela- Koort & Nardine (1990) who reported that poor Latino parents are less knowledgeable that other minority groups about their children's educational programs.

5. Role in the Education of SEA Children with Disabilities / Effectiveness.

The large majority of Southeast Asian parents (81.5%) think that teachers should help parents to understand the American concept of special education. Large proportion of the participants (77.8%) believe that parents should assist in educating their children with disabilities here in this country.

From their responses in the open ended section of the questionnaire, parents think that the knowledge of English, good discipline and respect will help their children in schools. They would

like their children to be able to continue to communicate with them in their native language, and be apt to maintain their culture and traditions that they think is being deluded in this country. Since some studies indicate that Asian Americans could became more assimilated into the American mainstream, there is a concern that their family traditions will succumb.

Parents are ready to give to teachers all the support needed to accomplish their aspiration of good education. One overriding concern that this parents have, is the lack of discipline in schools and that, the children having too much freedom.

The social and economic limitations that they are confronting in addition to the difficult living conditions, are in their concept major obstacles for their children to excel in education, all of this compounded by the number of unprepared teachers in special education unable to understand Southeast Asian language and culture.

Is their perception, that teachers should be competent to cultivate in the school Southeast Asian children's language, culture and traditions, as well as, to help them developing the skills to live in this society. Parents believe that teachers not only should work hard and explain concepts for the students to understand, but to guide their children, teach them traditional social values. All of these is crucial they believe, if these children are considered slow learner.

To assist and provide support in the educational process of their children, parent would like to get more information about special education and places were to get assistance in this regard.

In addition parents expressed that they would like to see American schools working very close with their Southeast Asian children with special needs, providing them the same educational quality that American children are receiving. They are interested having bilingual special education teachers, well prepared, who can accept their children, able to understand and educate them efficiently.

6. Parents' Summary

For the parents surveyed, the Chi-Square analysis was performed using gender, age group, level of education and number of language spoken, to see if there was any significant relationship with key questions of the survey.

The variables of gender yielded one significant result in the relationship with item 36 *(SEA children with disablities should be secluded).* Female parents had less disagreement with respect to this variable.

Age group as a variable in the Chi-Square analysis proved to have a significant relationship with a number of variables. A significant relationship was found between age group and item 24 *(Having a child with disabilities is the result of the influence of bad spirits).* Younger parents had less disagreement with this than older parents.

Age group was significantly related to item 26 *(Destiny and fate are the reason of having children with disabilities).* Younger parents have less agreement with this. A significant relationship between age group and item 28 *(SEA children with disabilities are often discriminated against).* Younger parents have a greater agreement with this than older parents. Age group was found to be significantly associated with item 29 *(People are pejudiced against SEA children with disabilities).* Here again, younger parents had greater agreement with this issue. A significant relationship was found between age group and item 35 *(SEA children with disabilities are often abused).* Younger parents agreed a higher level than older parents with respect to this matter. Age group was found to be significantly related to item 36 *(SEA children with disabilities should be secluded).* Younger parents were in greater agreement with this statement. Finally, age proup was found to have a significant association with item 37 *(SEA children with disabilities should be prepared to live independently).* Younger parents indicated greater agreement with this statement than older ones.

No significant relationship were found using Chi-square analysis with level of education and the number of languages spoken. A summary of the findings by dimension variables follows:

Schooling / Special Education of SEA Children.

1. About half of the Southeast parents have concerns regarding gifted and talented student, a large proportion of believe, that this children should receive special education services.

2. Parents overwhelmingly have very good feelings about their schools, and the experience about special education is positive.

3. Some of the concerns that parents have about schools is he deficiency of qualified bilingual special education teachers and the lack of students'discipline.

Factors Affecting Perception of Disabilities.

1. Tradition and culture more than historical factors affect parents their view of education in this country.

2. Regarding the idea that Southeast Asian children with disabilities should attend school, the parents' opinion is divided in half.

3. To know about children with disabilities is a very private matter for about half of the parents, they think that it should be kept inside of the family.

4. Having children with disabilities is puzzling for half of Southeast Asian parents, but one quarter of them believe that it is due to destiny/fate more than witchcraft or bad spirits.

5. Parents opinion is divided regarding the idea of discrimination or prejudice against Southeast Asian children with disabilities.

6. About one quarter of parents believe that children with disabilities are neglected, and approximately one half are not sure about it.

7. More than half of parents think that children with disabilities should not be secluded, but they have the feeling that they are not prepared to live independently, preferring to keep them at home.

8. About half of the parents indicated that children with disabilities will be able to work.

Awareness and Knowledge of Special Education.

1. Almost all the parents are unaware of what children with disabilities are doing in school, and they know nothing about special education or the services that they offer.

Role / Effectiveness in educating Children with Disabilities.

1. All parents want to learn about special education, and they believe that teachers should help them to understand this concept.

2. Parents believe that they can assist teachers in school educating their children.

3. Knowledge of English, discipline and respect will help their children to do well in school.

4. Parents would like their children to maintain their native language and culture. Teachers they believe have an important role in this regard.

5. Parents expect that teachers should be a competent, hard working individuals not only able to cultivate their children in school, in

addition to teaching them traditional values and developing skills to live in this society, but to understand, accommodate and guide them.

6. Southeast Asian parents like to have American schools working very close with their children, and providing not superior rights but the same education quality that other American children are receiving.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate a strong desire and need of Southeast Asians (parents and teachers) to receive more preparation on special education issues and topics. School administrators should tap into this potential resource, to make programs more effective and efficient, where teachers not only are able to teach and empower their special needs students, but become advocates of special education. Teachers believe this knowledge will allow them to be more prepared to work in their schools, as well as, assist parents to learn about these issues, thus bringing closer the school and the Southeast Asian community.

The results also show, that teachers in the older age groups are likely to have been less trained and to know very little bout the availability of special education services, than those in the younger age groups. This finding seems to validate the need for Southeast Asian teachers to receive in-service training, which is more crucial for older teachers. Professional development, will allow all teachers to become more knowledgeable about current special education trends and practices, because the more education they receive, the greater the likelihood that both Cambodians parents and teachers will get involved in education, thus expecting more and better educational services for their children with disabilities.

Amongst the teachers, there is strong agreement about the willingness to educate parents regarding special education concepts and approaches, however they would like themselves to get that knowledge first .

It was evident trough the responses that individuals who have limited education and/or who are isolated in their own single

language, are unable to see the educational needs of their children with disabilities, and their views are more inflexible and parochial. Thus, there is a need for more Southeast Asian special education teachers who are bilingual. In all, there is a general need for greater communication to facilitate the acculturation process and to establish or maintain social interaction with the majority group to break down cultural conflicts and misconceptions, based on traditional cultural beliefs, that consider children with special educational needs as a family "embarrassment" thus calling for relegation and isolation.
Parents ambivalent opinion regarding the notion of discrimination or prejudice against Southeast Asian children with disabilities is perhaps because it is subtle, or as Uba attest in her book (p. 24) that institutional racism also may explain their controversial admittance, concluding that "Asians... are still subject to cultural racism"

The lack of meaningful communication between the school and SEA parents is in many cases the source of confusion. When in some occasion there is communications, it is not preceived by SEA parents to encourage or value their participation, because parents presence or voice in many instances are rather view as antagonist.

More specifically, with respect to Southeast Asian parents, (many from low socio-economic levels) many expressed the need to be a much greater part of the picture in the education of their children in school, than they have been in the past, there is a strong desire on the part of parents and Southeast Asian teachers to be part of a team in the education process. There is solid agreement among parents about the faith and the high value that they place on education.

Their view of ideal schooling for Southeast Asian parents is to have a conducive place where children are well behaved, learning English, their native language, culture and values; where they are accepted, understanded and accomodated. The "ideal" for Vygotsky is an aspect of the culture and not only of the individual's consciousness. Teachers in their view should be individuals with authority and well respected, who are close to the children in order to guide and prepare them to live harmoniuosly in society. In the parents view students and teachers should work hard. This view is also in accordance to Vygotsky's concept of teaching, where teachers, in close relationship

with the student, guide and direct them for further development, without impossition. It is the belief among SEA families that achievement depends greatly in effort and not only in ability (Tsan, Sua-Lim , 1993). However almost all these parents are unaware of what their children with disabilities are doing in school, and are uninformed about special education services available or parental rights, even when they manifested constantly their concern and initial interest to support their children education. Uba (1994. pgs.198, 248) in her study points out that Southeast Asians many times underutilize available mental health services.

These SEA parents expressed clearly, their determination to know more about special education to materialize their wish to help teachers in the education of their children. There are, however, a number of barriers related to culture and tradition, in addition to the unfamiliarity with the American education system, rules and regulations. Parental participation is crucial since in special education is required by law in many states and at federal level.

The findings of this study indicate that parents who have not been affected by the acculturation process while in this country, and who remain monolingual, uneducated, affected by traumatic experience of war, displacement, poverty and difficult living conditions, place unnecessary limitations on their special needs children due to cultural misconceptions. Many times, because of the hard living conditions confronted daily by parents, educational concerns or activities become relegated. A large number of these parents still feel that their children with special needs can contribute to society but are not prepared to function independently. For many, still there is a dominant belief, based on cultural and historical factors that, good, bad deeds and spiritualism are responsible for their children's special needs; the rest of parents are puzzled about this condition. Based on their family tradition, Southeast Asian parents like to keep children at home, this feeling is stronger specially if one has disabled children, who many times, are rather secluded than integrated.

From their responses it is evident that Southeast Asian teachers and parents have a particular conception, different that the traditional American ones, about their responsabilities regarding the education of

children with disabilities and their role to play with schools. preferring to defer this formal activity to teachers in schools. In summary, socio-cultural values, such as religion and traditions, still have strong influence in the perception in this country, that Southeast Asians have about disabilities and special education intervention.

To have an efficient educational program, with personnel that won't misunderstand or misrepresent Southeast Asian parents and children with disabilities, these beliefs must be considered in any curriculum designed for Southeast Asian children, as well as, in professional development programs, where culture sensitivity should be one of the main components. One only can hope, that the strong desire expressed by Southeast Asian parents to know more about special education, will provide the opportunity for them to became enlightened with respect to the nature, efficacy, and positive impact of especial education in the lives of their children.

All of these requires that, when developing policies and educational practices that affect Southeast Asians, educational personnel should have cultural awareness, knowledge and skills to address effectively the special needs of this emerging population, and the direction that is necessary to persue in education is one of *pedagogy of cooperation.*

To conclude, our accomplishment during the 18 months of the grant period, has been productive, tangible and concrete. During this time, and because of the ethnographic nature of this study, we were able to spend time with members of the Southeast Asian community, get into their homes and to know more directly about their fine human conditions and qualities, as well as, to learn about their sense, feelings and beliefs regarding disabilities and education in American schools. The knowledge acquired permitted us to share findings of this study with others, at national and regional conferences, to foster better inter-cultural understanding as it is related to the education of Southeast Asian children with disabilities. Our hope is that, as a result of this exploratory work, more research in this area will continue to develop, that ultimately will benefit students, parents and educators that are involved in our country's school systems, with the special education needs of Southeast Asian children.

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APPENDIX

Profile of Respondents

TABLE # 2

Gender	Teachers	Parents	Total	%
Male	14	47	61	48
Female	15	52	67	52
Total	29	99	128	100 %

TABLE #3

Age	Teachers	Parents	Total	%
20-30	3	7	10	8
30-40	12	45	57	45
40-50	10	26	36	29
50+	5	18	23	18
Total	30	96	126	100

TABLE #4

	IN NATIVE COUNTRY		IN UNITED STATES	
EDUCATION	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
Elementary	4	52	0	4
Secondary	4	14	1	4
College	12	2	12	5
B.S./B.A.	11	0	16	0
Total	31	68	29	13

TABLE #5

LANGUAGES SPOKEN	Teachers	Parents	Total
Only Native	6	55	55
Native & English	17	45	62
Nat.& Eng. +	7	0	7

TABLE # 6

HOUSE HEAD	Teachers	Parents	Total
Mother	3	48	51
Father	20	48	68
Grandparents	0	1	1
Older Brothers	2	2	4
Other	6	1	6
Total	31	100	130

TABLE # 7

List of Variables

1. General demographics
2. Schooling of SEA children and special education
3. Influence in the perception of disabilities
4. Awareness and knowledge of special education.
5. Role in the education of children with disabilities & Effectiveness

TABLE #8

List of Variables by items

A. TEACHERS

I. GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS.

ITEM #	*TOPIC*	
1	GENDER	
2	AGE GROUP	
3	RACE	
4	TIME IN USA	
	EDUCATION	(number of years, level(s)
5	Native country	
6	in US	
7	LITERACY	
	in Khmer only	
	in Khmer and English	
	in other languages	
	EMPLOYMENT (Not included for teachers)	
	FAMILY COMPOSITION	
8	Household head	
9	total number of people	
10	number of children	

II. SCHOOLING / SPECIAL EDUCATION

a. enrollment

	CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL	
11	Number/age/ grades/gender	
12	With disabilities/ grades / age /gender	
13	Sp. Ed. PROTOTYPE: (teaching)	
	health problems	
	mental problems	
	physical problems	
	gifted and talented	

b. experience w/ service delivery

15	PROBLEMS	
	because Sp. Ed (in general)	
16	confronted by students in Sp. Ed.	

17	QUALITY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
18	what like
19	what dislike

III. INFLUENCE IN THE PERCEPTION OF DISABILITIES

ITEM #	*TOPIC*
14	Feelings about school
20	Cultural factors
21	Historical factors
22	children w/ Sp.Ed.
	• cannot learn
27	• can learn
33	gifted and Talented need Sp. Ed.
28	• discrimination
29	• prejudice
23	Children w/ Sp. Ed is a private matter
24	Influence: bad spirits
25	witchcraft
26	destiny / fate
39	What cultural factors do
40	What historical factors do
41	How cultural factors affect
42	How historical factors affect

IV. AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION.

31	Teachers need to learn more about Sp. Ed.
32	Parents need to learn more about Sp. Ed.
36	Need to know more about local school system
37	Need for more Sp. Ed. teachers' training
38	Need to learn more about Sp. Ed. service delivery

V. ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES & EFFECTIVENESS

30	Teachers should help
34	Parents should help
35	Need to change Sp.Ed. for SEA
43	Things that help Sp.Ed.
44	Things that do not help Sp.Ed..
45	What teachers should do
46	What families should do

47 What American schools should do

TABLE # 9

List of Variables by Items

B. PARENTS

I. GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

ITEM #	TOPIC
1	GENDER
2	AGE GROUP
3	RACE
4	TIME IN USA
5	EDUCATION Native country (number of years, level(s)
6	EDUCATION in US (number of years, level(s)
7	LITERACY
	in Khmer only
	in Khmer and English
	in other languages
8	FAMILY COMPOSITION
	Household head
9	EMPLOYMENT (are you working?)
10	total number of people living at home
11	number of children

II. SCHOOLING / SPECIAL EDUCATION

a. enrollment

12 NUMBER of CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL /age/ grades/gender

13 NUMBER of CHILDREN go Sp.Ed./ grades / age /gender

14 Sp. Ed. PROTOTYPE:

- health problems
- mental problems
- physical problems
- gifted and talented

b. experience with service delivery

16 PROBLEMS confronted by parents

17 QUALITY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

18 what like (Open questions)

19 what dislike (Open questions)

III. INFLUENCES IN PERCEPTION OF DISABILITIES

ITEM #	TOPIC
15	Feelings about school
20	Cultural factors
21	Historical factors
22	children w/ Sp.Ed.
23	Children w/ Sp. Ed is a private matter
24	Influence: bad spirits
25	witchcraft
26	destiny / fate
27	• Disabled student can learn / cannot learn
28	• discrimination
29	• prejudice
32	Gifted and Talented need Sp. Ed.
34	Sp. Ed. children are: • neglected
35	• abused
36	• secluded
37	Sp.Ed. children should live independently
38	Should be able to work
42	What cultural factors do
43	What historical factors do
44	How cultural factors affect
45	How historical factors affect

IV. AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

31	Parents need to learn more about Sp. Ed.
39	Need to know more about local school system
40	Need to know Sp.Ed
41	Need to learn about Sp. Ed of services delivery

V. ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES & EFFECTIVENESS

33	Parents should help educating their Sp.Ed. children
46	Things that help Sp.Ed.
47	Things that do not help Sp.Ed..
48	What teachers should do
49	What families should do
50	What American schools should do